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The top 5 environmental stories of 2017 (plus the top quotes)

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

In 2017, North Carolinians eyed their glasses of water more carefully, breathed less deeply and waited not-so-patiently for Duke Energy and the industrialized swine farms to clean up their pollution. Here are the top five environmental stories of the year.

1. GenX and emerging contaminants put the state in uncharted waters

Before this summer, the word “GenX” referred to the people born between 1965 and 1979. Now the term has a more sinister connotation: a chemical compound discharged from the Chemours plant in Fayetteville that has contaminated private and public drinking water supplies from Cumberland County south to New Hanover County.

Since June, when the Wilmington Star-News broke the story, the state has played a game of environmental whack-a-mole. GenX in the river, the groundwater, the drinking water, then private wells, then lakes, and now the air.

Meanwhile, state lawmakers have held innumerable hearings, convened a special River Quality Committee and until recently, kvetched ad nauseum about the failures of the NC Department of Environmental Quality – while slashing the agency’s budget. (See No. 5)

But as scientists, state environmental officials and lawmakers have learned, these emerging contaminants, including GenX, reach far beyond the Cape Fear River watershed. Just last week, chemical cousins to GenX were detected in Jordan Lake and the Town of Cary drinking water.

What’s not being said – at least by the conservative legislative majority – is that the state must pass stricter regulations on industry, even if the polluters are their campaign donors.

2. Atlantic Coast Pipeline puts the smackdown on uncooperative landowners

“160 miles, eight counties and untold environmental damage”: It’s probably not the slogan Duke Energy and Dominion Energy, the major owners of the ACP would choose, but it’s closer to the truth than anything they’ve

come up with.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline, a 600-mile conduit for natural gas, would run from its fracking wellheads in West Virginia through Virginia and communities of color in eastern North Carolina before heading to South Carolina.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has approved the ACP, but the deal is not yet done. DEQ still hasn't issued all of the necessary air and water quality permits because even after multiple revisions and thousands of pages, ACP's paperwork is missing vital information, such as detailed drawings and emissions information.

ACP, LLC is also pulling a sneaky legal maneuver on the recalcitrant landowners who don't want to sell rights of way to the company. Usually, when a company declares eminent domain, landowners get paid before construction begins. In this case, the pipeline owners want to punish the uncooperative landowners by using a "quick-take" method, in which they claim the land now but pay later.

What's worse, to build the pipeline, contractors would have to carve up rivers and wetlands, mow down saplings and mature trees, and try to save the endangered and threatened species that are in the way. The pipeline will inevitably leak some amount of methane – a potent greenhouse gas – and other pollutants. But rest assured, ACP, LLC says it will plant some bee-friendly bushes along the route.

3. Duke Energy Progress: Pay 'til it hurts

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- [Chemical cousins to PFAs, PFOAs, found in Jordan Lake, Town of Cary drinking water](#)
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